OBITUARY

FRITZ W. WENT, botanist and plant physiologist died in Reno, Nevada, on 15 May 1990 at the age of 86. Went is perhaps best known as the discoverer of the plant hormone auxin. He was a faculty member at Cal Tech in Pasadena (1933–1958), Director of the Missouri Botanical Garden and later Director of the Desert Research Institute at Reno, Nevada. During his tenure at Cal Tech, Went's interest in controlled plant growth studies led him to design a very complex plant growth facility for the purpose of controlling environmental conditions. According to Bonner (1991) this structure was named a "phytotron" by Went's irreverent collegues (from "phyton" for plant and "tron" for big, expensive, complex machine). Today, the term phytotron is part of the botanical lexicon.

Fritz West was a scientist with diverse interests who also contributed to the fields of ecology and evolution. He had a keen interest in desert plants and germination (Went 1948, 1949). In the 1940's, in association with Philip Munz, he initiated a study of seed longevity and germination behavior of California plants (Went and Munz 1949; Went 1969). He published papers on postfire chaparral regeneration (Went et al. 1952) and the allelopathic effect of desert shrubs on the herbaceous understory. It is of interest that his early study on the putative allelopathic effect of *Encelia farinosa* (Went 1942) attracted another scientist, Cornelius Muller, to studies of allelopathy. Curiously, Muller, who later made his reputation in studies of allelopathy began the study of allelopathy (Muller 1953) by re-examining Went's purported case and concluded that the pattern Went observed was not due to allelopathy.

Fritz Went was a creative scientist and not afraid to speculate about new ideas. In 1971 he published an article on the phenomenon of convergent or parallel evolution in which he proposed a novel explanation for the evolution of parallel structures in a common environment; such as the abundance of red, tubular hummingbird pollinated flowers in the California flora. The accepted paradigm is that these structures are the result of natural selection working on gradual genetic changes that arise by mutation and recombination. Went (1971) made the provocative suggestion that these could arise by the non-sexual transfer of chromosomal fragments, perhaps through viral vectors. Although not a widely accepted view (e.g., Tucker 1974), it does illustrate the creative side of this colorful and important contributor to our discipline.

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—JON E. KEELEY, editor.